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AUTHOR Peters, William H.
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ABSTRACT

To gain insights into preservice teachers' growing capacity to be exploring, reflective practitioners, portfolio assessment is being adopted in some teacher education programs. The teacher as reflective practitioner and portfolio assessment became the foundations of one Carnegie-I research university's four-phase secondary education program. Portfolios in this university's program are used to promote self-analysis and critical reflection and to document the candidate's learning, growth, and development. The four phases of the program were designed using exploration, inquiry, problem solving, and decision making as key concepts to denote stages considered appropriate in the journey toward becoming a reflective practitioner. The four phases are: self directed experiences with adolescents (the exploring practitioner); understanding teaching and schools in modern society (the inquiring practitioner); developing skills to meet the needs of society and students (the problem-solving practitioner); and developing and demonstrating skills to organize content and technology for use in classrooms (the decision making practitioner). Program assessment suggests the coursework as measured by the program goals is effective, with portfolios reflecting preservice teachers as they wander through their journeys, find their voices, and define themselves and their profession. (Contains 20 references.) (SM)

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Through the Looking-Glass Portfolio:

The Journey of Preservice Teachers in Becoming Reflective Practitioners

by

William H. Peters
Texas A&M University
College of Education
Department of Educational Curriculum and Instruction
308 Harrington Tower
College Station, Texas 77843-4232
Phone: (979) 845-8360
E-Mail: wpeters@tamu.edu

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Through the Looking-Glass Portfolio: The Journey of Preservice Teachers in Becoming Reflective Practitioners

Introduction

Preservice teachers, like Alice, move through the looking-glass when they journey through their field-based experiences and gain increasing insights into the teaching profession. To gain insights into the teaching profession, however, an essential quality preservice teachers need to develop is what John Dewey (1933) termed critical reflection. He defined reflection " as an active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds supporting it and future conclusions to which it tends" (p. 6).

The notion of teacher as reflective practitioner gained support in the teacher education community with the publication of Schon's *The Reflective Practitioner* (1983). Because teachers are continuous decision-makers throughout classroom instruction (Colton & Spark-Langer, 1993; Lampert & Clark, 1990), preservice teachers gaining the capacity for reflectivity in their teacher education programs deserves emphasis. When programs are designed to foster reflective outcomes (Wedman, Martin, & Mahlios, 1990), growth in reflective thinking practices are made possible.

To gain insights into the preservice teacher's growing capacity in the habits of an exploring, reflective practitioner, portfolios as a means of assessment are being adopted in teacher education programs (Barton & Collins, 1993; Courts & McInerney, 1993; Mosenthal, 1993). Portfolios are seen as more authentic and allow the learner to accept more responsibility for his/her learning (Calfee & Perfumo, 1993; Wolf, 1989). Mokhtari, Yellin, Bull, and Montgomery (1996) suggest that portfolio assessment also help preservice teachers become more self-directed and reflective practitioners. The integration of theory and practice as seen in portfolios, however, is in need of further research (Carroll, Potthoff, & Huber, 1996).

The teacher as reflective practitioner and the portfolio as one means of assessment became the foundations of a Carnegie I Research university's four-phase secondary education program collaboratively designed by secondary school teachers and administrators, representatives from the content disciplines, and representatives in the College of Education (see Figure 1). Although there are numerous purposes for using portfolios, the portfolio in this university's program is used to promote self-analysis and critical reflection (Constantino & DeLorenzo, 1994; Kendall, 1994; McKee, 1993) and to document the candidate's learning, growth, and development (Barton & Collins, 1993; Stowell, Rios, McDaniel, & Kelly, 1993; Yarger-Kane, 1994).

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY SECONDARY PRESERVICE PROGRAM

Phase I	Phase II	Phase III	Phase IV
Self-Directed Experiences with Adolescents	Understanding Teaching and Schools in Modern Society	Developing Skills to Meet the Needs of Society and Students	Developing and Demonstrating Skills to Organize Content and Technology for Use in Classrooms
	Teacher as Reflective Practitioner		
Exploring Practitioner	Inquiring Practitioner	Problem Solving Practitioner	Decision Making Practitioner
	Technology		
	Learning about	Learning from	Learning with

Figure 1

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Program Design

Phase I: Self-Directed Experiences with Adolescents--the Exploring Practitioner

The *self-directed individual* is one who assumes responsibility for identifying, carrying out, documenting, and evaluating a series of experiences in light of the goals that he or she wishes to accomplish. Self-directed implies self-responsibility and freedom to choose. Since a critical competency for effective teaching is decision-making, the potential teacher will begin to develop this ability at the very beginning of the program. This course requires the preservice teacher to demonstrate that he/she is a self-directed individual.

The self-directed individual engages in a continuous process of exploring and reflecting to develop a deeper understanding of self in relation to the teaching-learning process. As used in this context, *exploring* involves systematic investigation into the developmental process of adolescents and the impact of such factors as gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status (SES), cultural diversity, community, and family have on their progress.

Reflecting means to think. But it also requires one to consider, meditate, contemplate, ponder, deliberate, and speculate about the meaning of experiences as they relate to teaching. In the context of this course, *reflection* requires one to write about his/her experiences in two ways: to write about first impressions of experiences with adolescents; and to write in-depth about oneself in relation to the experiences one has had which requires the ability to analyze and synthesize.

The *portfolio* begun during this course will be cumulative throughout the candidate's preparation as a secondary teacher. The portfolio must document three or more experiences in a variety of settings serving adolescents of differing race, ethnicity, languages, socio-economic levels, and special needs. A minimum of 45 clock hours of

involvement is required. The candidate defends the portfolio before a panel composed of a practicing teacher, a professor in the candidate's content area, and an education professor.

Phase II: Understanding Teaching and Schools in Modern Society-- the Inquiring Practitioner

The *inquiring practitioner* listens, questions, and debates from an open and inquisitive posture the controversy that surrounds teaching and schooling in modern society. The development, structure, management, and finance of secondary schools is part of this controversy. It is the philosophical, historical, sociological, ethical and moral dimensions of teaching; the role of schools in a democratic society; and teaching as a profession, however, that provides the greatest base of controversy.

In the context of this course, *reflection* requires one to write about the experiences of today's student, today's teacher, and today's schools.

The *portfolio* documents the preservice teachers' thoughts and insights into the shadowing of a high school student throughout the day, the shadowing of a teacher throughout the day, and interviews with school administration and staff; the Field Experience Proposal that raises questions to consider and a method of investigation into public schools in largely lower SES and minority settings and in largely prosperous, upper middle-class, mostly White settings; and the Field Experience Investigative Report.

Assessing Phases I and II of the Secondary Program

Phases I and II are designed to help develop the exploring and inquiring practitioner and shift the responsibility for learning to the preservice teacher. Assessment is conducted through a qualitative design used to describe the secondary candidates' experiences with

adolescents in multiple settings and with teaching and schooling as demonstrated in their portfolios. A constant comparative method of data analysis is used comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences (Merriam, 1998).

Assessment findings in Phases I and II (Peters & Gibson, 1999) suggest these phases in the program are making a difference in terms of preservice teachers' experiences and their understanding of self, of the adolescent, of teaching in a democracy, and of today's schools. Interacting with minorities has brought many of these preservice teachers to the self-realization for the need to learn more about minority cultures, for the need to adapt to different life-styles, for the need to understand differing perceptions, and for the need to learn how to be non-judgmental. Preservice teachers begin to question their preconceptions about schools and about differing student populations within these schools.

Phase III: Developing Skills to Meet the Needs of Society and Students--the Problem Solving Practitioner

The *problem-solving practitioner* follows a problem-solving format in which three types of knowledge are integrated: *prior knowledge*, which reflects preservice teachers' preconceptions about teaching and learning that come from their own experiences as learners in classrooms; *theoretical knowledge*, which reflects the increasing knowledge base about teaching and learning derived from psychological, sociological, and educational research during the past half-century; and *relevant knowledge* about teaching and learning, which reflects the knowledge of teachers that comes into play when teachers must generate quick and concrete answers to situations in which they have little time to think or reflect on the more theoretical aspects of what they know about teaching and learning.

The integrated problem-solving model provides the theoretical framework that provides a platform for situated cognition (see, for example, Putnam and Borko, 2000). The

problem-solving format, therefore, is a means by which to integrate theory and practice. The model provides preservice teachers with contextualized, school-based learning experiences around problems associated with six identified problematic areas for beginning teachers: Effective Learning Environments, Motivation, Ethics of Teaching, Teaching Students How to Learn, Instructional Strategies, and Student Assessment and Evaluation. Three module topics are taught in each of two courses, with cohorts of students enrolled in the courses rotating through the modules. Teams of instructors include members of public school faculty and members of different departments within and outside the College of Education, with field experiences related to the topic under investigation in mentor teacher classrooms. In the context of these courses, one must synthesize teaching as reflective problem solving and the teacher as action researcher. *Reflection*, therefore, requires the analysis and synthesizing of multiple sources of data into a resolution of the problem area considered in each module.

The *portfolio* documents the final products of the problem-solving practitioner, such as the resolution to an assessment vignette or an ethical brief.

Assessing Phase III of the Secondary Program

Three sources of data have been used to evaluate the pilot courses in Phase III: (1) student formative evaluation, (2) formative evaluation meetings of course instructors and mentor teachers from the public schools, and (3) a summative evaluation meeting (Stuessy, 1999). Student formative evaluations are designed as 5-minute, open-ended response questionnaires administered at the end of the last class for each four-week module. Responses are analyzed to provide direction to course designers regarding changes that should be made to the structure, content, and delivery of university and school-based

experiences. Formative evaluation of course instructors consists of open-ended dialogue, after which the evaluator makes extensive field notes. Mentor teachers from each of the school sites complete mentor teacher evaluation surveys and the results are merged with course instructor comments and analyzed by constant comparative methods. The summative evaluation meetings have students fill out a Likert-type Student Questionnaire, data are compiled, frequencies are calculated as percentages, and comments categorized by constant comparative methods. In addition, a Jigsaw Evaluation Technique is designed for eliciting comments and recommendations from students for four focus areas formed from the synthesis of the formative meetings of course instructors and mentor teachers. The technique consists of three stages: (1) Brainstorming and Categorization, (2) Focus Area Synthesis, and (3) Presentation of Recommendations. The results are used to enhance, modify, or corroborate instructor data. Data from formative and summative evaluations were analyzed to answer three questions about student learning in the courses: (1) Did students meet the learning expectations of the course? (2) Were students asked to build on their prior knowledge? and (3) What did students learn and from what sources?

The findings suggest instructor satisfaction with their students' demonstrations of learning in keeping with the intended learning goals that are specified in each of the module syllabi; module instructors describe learning experiences that require students to reflect on their own experiences regarding each of the topic areas, embed them in the larger picture of the topic area, and generate questions to be used in interviews with their mentor teachers; and the problem-solving structure for the modules provide opportunities for students to acquire knowledge from their university classroom learning experiences, from their peers through class discussion, issues clarification, and project planning and implementation, and from their mentor teachers and classroom observations.

The pilot semester of Phase III reflects a promising process for integrating practical knowledge about teaching and learning from university and public school learning experiences. University modules that include classroom teachers, either as members of the instructional team or as guest speakers, will increase perceptions of relevance in learning. Coupled with meaningful, well-planned field experiences, new knowledge from university classes can be integrated with prior knowledge about teaching and learning. To reinforce learning from all sources, modules should provide field experiences that directly relate to the university course work and include problem identification and solution in the topic of study. Evaluation of this phase suggests the model successfully integrates three types of knowledge in a problem-solving format and builds the capacity for problem-solving and a readiness for decision-making in Phase IV of the program.

Phase IV: Developing and Demonstrating Skills to Organize Content and Technology for use in Classrooms--the Decision Making Practitioner

The *decision-making practitioner* has built the capacity for problem-solving and a readiness for decision-making. Practicum I focuses on the understanding of the preservice teacher's teaching discipline and how it is learned by secondary students. Content methods classes, held on-site in schools, emphasize the teaching/learning process and student-centered instruction. The course is team taught, with field experiences in the content mentor teacher classroom.

In the context of this course, *reflection* requires one to consider decision-making alternatives within one's discipline and the effectiveness of the alternative in the teaching/learning process.

The *portfolio* documents the capacity of the preservice teacher to construct large units of instruction within contextual variables of a given school district, including rationales for individual components of the unit, for selection of materials, for choice of learning activities, and for student assessment.

Demonstration of decision-making continues in Practicum II, which is a full semester of internship under the direction of a mentor teacher and a university supervisor.

Assessment of Phase IV of the Secondary Program

Preliminary assessment of portfolios as related to Phase IV of the secondary program suggest students bring to Phase IV a readiness for decision-making and the ability to reflect on those decisions. Mentor teachers in Practicum I report the preservice students have the capacity to design lessons, teach the lessons, and critically reflect on the positive aspects of the lesson as well as the challenges the lesson presented. The large units of instruction preservice teachers design reflect their decision-making processes through the rationales, the criteria for selection of materials, the learning activities for the implementation of their decisions, and the student assessments included in their units. Cooperating teachers in Practicum II report preservice teachers in the redesigned program are stronger in their overall capacity to assume responsibility for classes and in the ability to reflect on their teaching as they evaluate the strengths and weaknesses in their lessons.

Evaluation and Significance of the Program Design

Although the importance of developing reflective teachers has become accepted in the teacher education community, the term *reflection* often remains vague. To make this term better defined, the Collaborative designing this program used exploration, inquiry, problem-solving, and decision-making as key concepts to denote the stages considered

appropriate in the journey toward becoming a reflective practitioner. Program assessment suggests the coursework as measured by the program goals is being effective (Peters & Gibson, 1999; Stuessy, 1999). Like Lewis Carroll's Looking-Glass, the portfolio is reflecting the preservice teachers wandering through their journey, finding their voices, and defining themselves and their profession. Like Alice, by the end of the journey they have been provided systematic developmental opportunities to grow professionally and to leave their college days as reflective practitioners.

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